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Reviewing Stand

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How Can the American Heritage Survive?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System
in cooperation with the American Library Association

JOHN T. EASTLICK

Librarian, Denver Public Library

CYRIL O. HOULE

Dean, The University College, University of Chicago

ELDRIDGE T. McSWAIN

Dean, The School of Education, Northwestern University

MRS. GRACE THOMAS STEVENSON

Director, The American Heritage Project, The American Library Association

Moderator: JAMES H. McBURNEY

Dean, The School of Speech, Northwestern University

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How Can the American Heritage Survive?

MR. McBURNEY: Our speakers today are John T. Eastlick, Librarian of the Denver Public Library; Cyril O. Houle, Dean of the University College at the University of Chicago; Mrs. Grace Stevenson, Director of the American Heritage Project of The American Library Association; and E. T. McSwain, Dean of the School of Education, Northwestern University.

As you know, Mrs. Stevenson and gentlemen, we are presenting this discussion in cooperation with The American Library Association, and more particularly, this American Heritage Project with which you are very directly concerned, Mrs. Stevenson.

What is this project, in a sentence or two?

MRS. STEVENSON: The project was made possible by a grant from the Fund for Adult Education to The American Library Association, with which to establish adult community discussion groups on the background of our American heritage and its contemporary application, particularly the contemporary application.

MR. McBURNEY: What is this American heritage you are investigating? How would you describe it, McSwain?

Moral and Ethical Values

MR. McSWAIN: The American heritage is a way of life based on moral and ethical values. It is centered on the worth and dignity of each individual. It also guarantees to individuals the right to freedom, with responsibility.

MR. HOULE: Do you believe, McSwain, that this is something particularly American, or is it something which we have as an heritage from earlier times and other people, as well as our own?

MR. McSWAIN: I think it is a concept of life that has come through

the ages from the creative thinking of able men and women, and even though the experiment began to be developed in this country, the ideas didn't originate here; they are not typically American.

MRS. STEVENSON: Have we spelled it out in this country, particularly?

MR. EASTLICK: Yes, I think we have, Mrs. Stevenson.

MRS. STEVENSON: In what way? How?

MR. EASTLICK: Well, we spelled it out quite specifically in the Bill of Rights, I am sure. There are other places — in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence — where they guarantee such rights as freedom of speech, press, to work, and attitudes like that.

MR. McBURNEY: I hope we can pin down this American heritage. We have identified it with certain American documents with which we are all familiar, but more specifically, Houle, what is the heritage?

Freedom of Speech

MR. HOULE: Well, McBurney, you are Dean of the School of Speech; you ought to know one of them, at any rate. Freedom of speech is clearly one of the American freedoms that we are talking about, although, certainly, as McSwain says, it goes back to all of our history.

The first article of the Bill of Rights of our Constitution — the first amendment — says that we shall have no laws by our national government abridging the religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or prohibiting the freedom of speech, or of the right of people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress. In other words, these things indicate very clearly the proper role of the individual as he relates to the society around him.

MR. McSWAIN: But, Cy, doesn't that also mean that the individual, to earn these rights, must accept the responsibility of being careful of what he says in the exercise of freedom of speech, and that he must be concerned about the degree to which he is informed on that which he is discussing?

MR. HOULE: As Justice Holmes said, "The right of freedom of speech doesn't give you the right to cry 'Fire' in a crowded theater," and I think this is true of all of these rights.

Although freedom of religion is one thing we hold most dear, we still feel it has some limitations, when it comes to fanaticism; if a religion advocates assassination, for example, we have to do something about it. That is why these things are not quite immediately clear. They have to be discussed and thought about.

MRS. STEVENSON: And it seems to me that freedom also implies something else equally important, and that is the responsibility that we all have to see that the freedoms that we want and enjoy are allowed to other people as well.

MR. McBURNEY: These doctrines, these principles were promulgated away back in 1776, so far as this country is concerned, at least. Are they the same now as they were then, McSwain?

Same Values?

MR. McSWAIN: I think we can say that the values as they relate to the worth and dignity of human beings are the same. The application of these values must be recognized in relation to the conditions of society in which we live, and I would be a little more interested in not only preserving the American heritage but keeping it alive, and continuing to build it and to extend it. It is not something that is static; it is something that is always in the process of developing.

MR. EASTLICK: Our forefathers who wrote the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence probably absorbed their ideas from the earlier thinkers, the French, the British, and others. It represented a goal at that time. We are still working toward that goal — the achievement of all

these freedoms which they have listed for us.

However, as Dr. McSwain says, it always has to be a flexible, adjustable concept. We can't consider it as static at any time.

MR. HOULE: As you say, Eastlick, this is something for which people fought in those days, and which was not yet achieved. I should suggest that a parallel document today would be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations.

MRS. STEVENSON: Well, we still have to fight for the things that were in the Declaration of Independence, and we shall have to fight for a very long time, probably, about extending these principles to all the peoples of the world, which is what the Universal Declaration does, does it not?

MR. HOULE: But you have to keep running as hard as you can to stay where you are.

MRS. STEVENSON: Even to stay in the same place! [Laughter]

'Depends on Individuals'

MR. McSWAIN: What we found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are ideals and values, and how we apply those depends upon the courage and the understanding of individuals today.

MRS. STEVENSON: That is where our library program comes in. May I get in a "plug"?

MR. EASTLICK: Also, it depends on the willingness of the people to give and take on those ideas, not to look only for their own rights and privileges, but to look for those which they must safeguard for other persons.

MR. HOULE: And it strikes me that as long as we are pointing out all of these things which one must do, we should say it involves the obligation to take on unpopular stands. As Ibsen said, "You must never wear your best trousers when you go out to fight for liberty and truth."

MR. McBURNEY: From all that you people have been saying here, does that imply that we are wearing our best trousers in our fight for liberty and truth?

MR. HOULE: In my opinion, we are.

MR. McBURNEY: In other words, is this heritage of ours — to put it a bit crassly — down at the heels? Why are you whipping up this interest at this particular time, Mrs. Stevenson?

MRS. STEVENSON: We have two reasons. We think there is a good deal of apathy in the country. People are sitting back, times are good, and they say, "We don't have to fight for the things that we want." We don't think. So we are trying to overcome that apathy.

World Crisis

Furthermore, the world is in a very serious crisis, as I think you would all agree, and when we are in a world crisis, you have to fight for those things you hold dear.

MR. McSWAIN: I think we must also recognize — at least from my point of view — that the Russian Politburo is determined to win by advocating a way of life that may arouse the interest and support of the underprivileged peoples of the world. They have a philosophy of life that they want to sell to people, and they are doing it on the basis of values and meanings for individuals.

MR. HOULE: I think you're dead right, McSwain, but one of the things we have to remember in this modern fight is the powerful attractiveness of the American heritage and its past history.

First, it has attracted and welded together people from all over the world, because, really, very few of us in America today had ancestors who were in this country when the Constitution was written; we are Germans, Poles, Chinese, Czechs, Scots, Welsh, French, and we are Swedes. But we are also Americans, and I believe that it is the American heritage that has made us such, and it is these freedoms which we ought to establish as the doctrine and the set of beliefs which we can set up against Communism.

MR. EASTLICK: I'm afraid that the welding together of these various peoples has resulted in our considering the heritage as static. We are

afraid that it is going to be threatened; we are afraid it is not going to work as new problems come into the picture; we are afraid that there are going to be stresses and strains upon it which the Constitution, as it stands, can't meet.

MR. McSWAIN: Now you are causing me to raise this question in my mind: Here we are talking in a very fine way about what our forefathers did, and this great American heritage, but what are the people in the year 2000 going to say about the things that we are standing for today? What heritage are we building now?

MR. McBURNEY: Is there any possibility that this work on the American heritage is sort of a nostalgic effort to apply a horse-and-buggy philosophy to a jet plane age?

Discussion Groups

MRS. STEVENSON: Not as far as our project is concerned. The thing we talk about mostly in these very live discussion groups is "What are our problems today, and what can these basic fundamentals of our heritage do to help us solve them?"

We try to give people confidence in our system, and assurance that it is strong enough and flexible enough to withstand any kind of strain.

MR. EASTLICK: And we also try to give them, Mrs. Stevenson, the concept that they must participate in order to assist in the maintenance of this heritage — participation through voting and through the active carrying of responsibilities of citizenship!

MRS. STEVENSON: And to learn to translate this heritage into the institutions of our time.

MR. McBURNEY: I suspect we have this heritage reasonably well identified. You people are now beginning to talk about some of the responsibilities in this day and age. Let's see if we can make those responsibilities a bit more specific. After all, we are addressing ourselves to the question, "How can the American heritage survive?" How can it survive?

MR. McSWAIN: Well, McBurney, there are two and one-half billion people living on the face of the earth

today, and over half of them are underprivileged. They are the victims of control by the state or by individuals, and they are looking to people who are going to help them find these values and freedoms that we have talked about in this country. I think one thing that we in America can do — through discussion and reading — is to inform ourselves of the conditions of other peoples of the world, and what they are striving for and what they need.

MR. McBURNEY: Is it sufficient if we inform ourselves?

Point Four Program

MR. McSWAIN: No, I think we're going to have to be ready, also, to help them help themselves. I am a strong believer in our Point Four Program.

MR. HOULE: I am a strong believer in it, too, but let's not have any cultural imperialism. I know very well, Mac, that you believe as strongly as I do that as we work with these peoples — by going back to the very conditions in which they are making their initial struggle for independence and freedom — they are going to teach us a lot, too.

MR. McSWAIN: Yes, I grant you that. At the same time I think that we who have lived through this great experiment have something to offer them in the way of information and materials to work with that will increase their chances of developing the kind of government they need.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, your Point Four Program goes considerably beyond providing them with information, if I understand it.

MR. McSWAIN: It provides them with technical help, with resource help. It is not a process of giving it to them, but a way of providing the facilities to help them raise themselves.

MR. McBURNEY: In attempting to help our neighbors — which is certainly a good, Christian policy — is there any possibility that we might get ourselves in an extended position where we wouldn't be so strong at home?

MR. McSWAIN: I personally believe if we used as much money for helping other peoples of the world as we are

in developing our military program, our chances of survival might be greater.

MR. McBURNEY: To raise another issue: What are you people going to do about those in our midst who reject our heritage and are working to destroy it?

MR. HOULE: One difficulty about such people is that they often use the symbols of our heritage to destroy it. They often say they are for free enterprise and freedom of speech while at the very moment they may be working effectively to kill both.

MRS. STEVENSON: And to deny it to everybody else, I might add.

Complacency

MR. McSWAIN: Well, I'm not as much concerned about these few that you are referring to as I am the millions who seem to be complacent about their responsibilities as free citizens to carry out in daily living the obligations that the Constitution places upon each of us!

MR. EASTLICK: Yes, I agree with you, Dr. McSwain. I think if the American democracy, as we know it, did not have a challenge, we might become even more complacent than we are now.

MR. HOULE: When you start talking about people who are complacent and ignorant, I get a slightly guilty feeling. I'm not sure I'm doing as much as I should be doing. What should I do?

MR. McBURNEY: Well, so far it has been said that you should go to your library and attend a discussion group and that you should vote.

MR. HOULE: Well, I do that, anyway.

MR. McSWAIN: I would say more than that. I think I should work just as hard for other people to have the choice of their religion, of their political party, of their economic privilege, as I want for myself. I also think that it is my responsibility to be careful how I use my freedom to vote, and that I use it to vote for the man or woman I think has the ability and moral integrity to work for those things that our heritage has given us.

MR. McBURNEY: Now you're beginning to get specific. I'm going to press the question: What should John Doe, living in Vermillion, South Dakota, do about this, or in Baton Rouge, Louisiana? So far you have said he should affiliate himself with a library discussion group or some other community project that would help him better to understand this heritage, and McSwain has just said again he ought to exercise his right to vote.

Education and Knowledge

MR. EASTLICK: I feel very strongly that the American public — and each individual in the American public — has a definite responsibility to understand the issues which are before the country. In other words, people need the education and knowledge essential to the success of a democracy in order to participate most effectively in a democracy.

MR. McBURNEY: Now, that is a lot easier said than done. When I go to the polls to vote, and see a long list of names on the ballot, I'm not completely illiterate, but don't I have to be guided by party declarations, in which I have some confidence? I don't know these people. Here they are — for county offices and municipal offices, to say nothing of national offices.

MRS. STEVENSON: You do, I suppose, to a certain extent, but that does not relieve you of your obligation to inform yourself as fully as you possibly can. All of us can do that much. These are places where you can find information if you will just take the time and responsibility to do it.

MR. HOULE: But telling us to inform ourselves, and setting a goal for us, doesn't really — I think, Mrs. Stevenson — answer the question in a good many places. As one who is a student of adult education, I know all too well and all too uncomfortably that there are really very few institutions in our modern society to serve the hundred million American adults.

One thing which I am trying to do — and which McSwain used to do before he went on to higher things — is to attempt to build an adult educational program within a university as you

are building one within a public library. I suppose those of us who do have some connection with these institutions have a kind of sense of responsibility. But I must say, in all humility, I don't think I am doing adequately myself to build, to build new programs, new sorts of ways by which people can rather effectively look at their society systematically and know something about it.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, I assume that a great many great American institutions share in this task — our great public school system, our private school system, our churches, temples and synagogues share in this responsibility.

MR. HOULE: And the Northwestern Reviewing Stand. [Laughter]

MR. McBURNEY: I hope it does.

MRS. STEVENSON: And he didn't mention the public library.

MR. McSWAIN: Dr. McBurney, I think there are many institutions where we can find help. The important thing, for me, is to be motivated to want to use the facilities that are available, to ask myself if I do understand what are some of the basic issues that threaten our American heritage, and what understanding, how much information I have on each of these issues.

The Public Library

MR. HOULE: But this is true, and our task in society, as Dean McBurney has said, is to build all these institutions. It does seem to me, however, that in many ways the library is the perfect place to celebrate and discuss the American heritage, because it is so clearly an embodiment of the heritage. It's free. It fights for our tradition of individual enterprise and opportunity, and offers hope and encouragement and understanding, and it is a fulfillment of a dream. It contains the diverse viewpoints and the thoughts that men have had. It is one of the great resources. And there is one wonderful thing about a public library — you can go there any day and begin.

MRS. STEVENSON: That comes much

better from you than it did from me, Mr. Houle. I hoped you would say those words.

MR. McBURNEY: Since we are talking about the libraries, I have been in them off and on, and I think often they impress you as a place where great quiet exists, and a rather austere person presides over the checking in of books and the checking out of books, and the consummate achievement is gained when all books are in and in perfect order.

MR. HOULE: Dean McBurney, I can't think how many years out of date you are. [Laughter]

MRS. STEVENSON: I was hoping you would reply to that one.

MR. HOULE: I do think, as Fielding said, McBurney, that you shouldn't pretend more ignorance than you really have. [Laughter]

MR. McSWAIN: You say, Cy, that the library may serve as a center for organizing discussion groups, and to provide leaders for discussion groups, that the public libraries may do for adults in this country what our public schools have done for children in their youth.

MR. HOULE: I think it is one institution which ought to do so, but with a hundred million adults going to school—ideally, let's say, for 40 or 50 years—there is plenty of room for all of the agencies we have been talking about.

MR. McBURNEY: Now I would be horribly remiss in my responsibility as moderator here if I didn't give the Librarian of the Denver Public Library a chance to jump on me a bit.

Contribution of Libraries

MR. EASTLICK: I'm sure it has been many years ago since you went into a public library. There are some seven thousand public libraries in the United States. Each of these, assuming such responsibilities as we have discussed here, could contribute a great deal to the development of the American heritage and to the political thinking of America.

The library you describe, Mc-

Burney, is certainly one which has long since disappeared, in most cases. For your information, there is generally far more noise in the library than in many other institutions in the city.

MR. McBURNEY: I am sure your description of the library is more faithful than mine.

Now I want to go back to this bill of particulars that we were attempting to develop here. We have said a number of specific things—that there should be political participation, that we should exercise our right to vote. To what does this heritage commit us in the economic realm, would you say, Houle?

Economic Commitment

MR. HOULE: It seems to me that it commits us to a kind of government which loosely we call democratic. We have been calling this the American heritage because it is in this form that we cherish it, but we do want to remember that this heritage goes far beyond and behind America, and goes far outward into other realms.

MR. McBURNEY: Excuse me. You are still talking in political terms. My question was in the economic realm.

MR. HOULE: Yes. I believe that in the economic realm we have to have a system of real free enterprise, by which I mean the opportunity of the individual to develop to the extent of his ability and to work collectively, where he is not hampered either by government or by economic institutions which say they are working for free enterprise but, in effect, are attempting to cut it out.

MR. McBURNEY: Now I want to ask a very specific question on that, Houle, if I may. Are you saying that the American heritage which we have been discussing here commits us to the free enterprise system, that the free enterprise system is inherent in these principles?

MR. HOULE: You should really consult an economist rather than me on this question, because so much is done under the name of the free en-

terprise system that we don't really know what it is, in many cases. But I do believe that an economic system which calls for the ability of the individual to develop and to have aspirations and to have goals is essential.

MR. McBURNEY: Well, if I may attempt to answer my own question, I believe that most emphatically. I do not believe that you can have Communism or that you can have Fascism, and I'm thinking of those in economic terms now.

MR. HOULE: Yes.

MR. McBURNEY: And have our American heritage! I think we are committed in the economic realm to a system of free enterprise.

Now, that gives you plenty of latitude. It may not be the free enterprise system that I like or you like, Mrs. Stevenson, or that you like, McSwain. There is plenty of room for debate, but I think we are committed to that concept.

MR. McSWAIN: I think we must recognize that we are facing an opposition today that is out to win, and it is necessary for those of us who believe in our great American heritage to try to find some grounds of agreement on those things that are important. There seems to be great opportunity in this country, which can be preserved only as we individually practice the things the heritage stands for.

MR. HOULE: There is no doubt about that, Mac.

Rights for Worker

One thing that we ought to say in connection with this discussion on free enterprise—in which I feel a bit uncomfortable, myself, since I am not an economist—one thing I would always argue for is that not only should we have the right of business and of industry to determine its own development, but we've got to fight for the right of the worker and the other people in our society to express their views in this economic realm in which they have as great a stake as any of the rest of us.

MR. McBURNEY: With that I think we all agree. Now I want to ask another question: To what does this heritage we are discussing here commit us in the international realm? Earlier in the discussion, Houle, you referred to the—What was it?

International Responsibility

MR. HOULE: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

MR. McBURNEY: Yes, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as contained in the United Nations. Now, spell that out a bit.

MR. HOULE: Well, we know that the Constitution of this country was worked out through a long series of negotiations by people of thirteen colonies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was worked out by the representatives of over fifty nations, working and collaborating together to try to find a real expression of man's unity in thought and belief; and therefore it strikes me that it is the same kind of a document, except, of course, that its base is so much broader. It builds on the kind of things in our American heritage, but carries them a stage beyond.

MR. McBURNEY: This brings us back to this question that was before us earlier, about the danger we run of a sort of cultural imperialism. Is it our God-given task to carry the word—if necessary, with dollars—to Korea, to Russia, to Germany? Or, if necessary, with guns?

MRS. STEVENSON: That is completely inconsistent with our American heritage, the use of force . . .

MR. McBURNEY: Hold on—I don't agree with that.

MR. McSWAIN: I think, though, it means that we must have greater faith in the things we say the heritage presents to us, and that we must not only be interested and strive to provide those things for Americans, but we must help to bring those about for the people of the world who are wanting to be free.

ANNOUNCER: I'm sorry, Mrs. Stevenson and gentlemen, but our time is up.

Suggested Reading



Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.

BENNETT, WALLACE F. *Faith and Freedom; the Pillars of American Democracy*. New York, Scribner, 1951.

An examination of equality and liberty is presented by the founding fathers and understood and practiced by the American people; consideration is also given to those forces which are threatening these ideals.

JOHNSON, GERALD W. *This American People*. New York, Harper, 1951.

A review of the fundamental freedoms of the American heritage examined in view of today's problems.

LOVEDAY, A. *The Only Way: A Study of Democracy in Danger*. New York, Macmillan, 1951.

To preserve democracy and our American heritage, we must restore our faith and confidence in ourselves and our ideals.

MOWRER, EDGAR A. *Challenge and Decision; a Program for the Times of Crisis Ahead, for World Peace Under American Leadership*. New York, McGraw, 1951.

Physical and moral extinction are ahead for the world if the United States does not offset the threat of Soviet Communism through a decision for world leadership in forming a Peace Coalition of non-Communist countries.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 278:38-46, Nov., '51. "The Ideological Strength and Weakness of the American Position." T. V. SMITH.

Mr. Smith gives emphasis to our strengths but points out that there exists "discrepancies between the facts and the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality."

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 278:56-61, Nov., '51. "Point Four: The Maturing of a Policy." H. G. BENNETT.

A resume of the developments, motivations and new thought patterns concerning the giving of technical aid to other countries in an effort to preserve our American way of life.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 278:1-11, Nov., '51. "Truth as a Weapon of the Free World." R. L. BRECKER.

Our propaganda will remain effective only so long as it stems from truth and is demonstrated by example and action.

Atlantic 184:17-22, Ag., '49. "Conquest of America." A. MACLEISH.

We are facing a moral crisis in our history and only moral action and the regaining of our initiative can aid us in making the critical decisions which challenge our heritage.

Childhood Education 27:56-61, Oct., '50. "Understanding Our Heritage." L. K. FOX.

Children must be taught to understand and appreciate our heritage if it is to be defended by them.

Educational Leadership 8:458-61, My., '51. "Education — Democracy's Best Defense." R. B. KENNAN.

A discussion of the enemies of public education with a presentation of their tactics and suggested counter measures which may be used to keep our public schools free.

Foreign Affairs 28:525-47, Jl., '50. "America Today." L. GALANTIERE.

A survey and analysis of America today, picturing briefly its status among other countries of the world.

Harvard Educational Review 21, no. 3:137, Summer, '51. "The Public School and the American Heritage."

A statement on the value of free education as presented in the policy written by the National Education Association's National Commission to Defend Democracy Through Education.

The Historian 14:45-69, Autumn, '51. "Religious Freedom in American History." H. K. BEALE.

Religious liberty and belief in the value of the individual, as Americans understand it, is derived primarily from the American way of life and is a great bulwark of democracy.

Journal of General Education 4:54-67, Oct., '49. "On the Meanings of 'Democracy': The UNESCO Inquiry."

The answers obtained through a questionnaire circulated by the director general of UNESCO in an effort to discover why the word "democracy" has so many meanings and constantly suffers through ambiguity and misuse.

Library Journal 76:985-9, Je. 15, '51. "Exploring the American Idea, New York Public Library Program." M. V. D. MATHEWS.

A reading and discussion program sponsored by the New York Public Library gives Americans an opportunity to explore their "heritage" and find out how rich it is.

Mississippi Valley Historical Review 37:427-50, Dec., '50. "The American Heritage of Hope, 1865-1940." B. C. SHAFER.

A survey of the potential strength of America which is derived from an ability to look to the future and has helped to keep our American heritage alive.

Saturday Review of Literature 32:92, Ag. 6, '49. "American Blend: Regional Diversity and National Unity." H. W. ODUM.

The strength of America is in its unity which, although made up of unlike elements, is a strongly integrated whole.

School and Society 70:129-31, Ag. 27, '49. "American Way of Life." R. M. HUTCHINS.

An address by the former chancellor at the University of Chicago who states concisely that the heritage of America is in danger and clearly points out how it may be rescued.



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